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2020-07

Galan , C & Lämsä, R 2020 , ' Stirring the 'language policy soup' : Japanese in
language education policies in France and Finland ' , Ca Foscari Japa
nology, pp. 165-184 . <https://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-428-8/008>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/318150>

<https://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-428-8/008>

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Stirring the ‘Language Policy Soup’ Japanese in Language Education Policies in France and Finland

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Abstract This paper compares and contrasts the ‘Japanese language policy soup’ as it is currently cooked in a bottom-up and top-down manner in schools in two EU countries, France and Finland, with different culinary and educational traditions and practices. The Authors describe and analyse not solely the end result, Japanese language education at schools, but also the roles of the various stakeholders who partake in Japanese language policy making in the French and Finnish language ecologies.

Keywords Japanese Language Education. Upper secondary school. Language Education Policy. France. Finland.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Japanese in Language Education (Policy) Soup. – 3 Who Is the Chef? Japanese Language Teachers in Schools. – 4 Menus and Recipes for Japanese Language Education (Policy) Soup. – 5 Pots and Pans. Where to Cook the Japanese Language (Policy) Soup? – 6 The Future of Japanese Language Education (Soup).

1 Introduction

The study of Japanese has different roots and histories in France and Finland, but recently various measures and reforms have affected the role of Japanese in language education in schools in both countries. This paper maps the evolving status of Japanese language learning in (basic and) secondary education



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Ca' Foscari Japanese Studies 13 | Linguistics and Language Education 1

e-ISSN 2724-2285 | ISSN 2724-1203

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-428-8 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-429-5

Peer review | Open access

Submitted 2020-02-21 | Accepted 2020-06-03 | Published 2020-07-03

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DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-428-8/008

165

from the perspective of language education policies as they are currently manifested at the macro and micro level. Both countries are affected by EU language education policy, but there are also notable differences between them which make a comparison between France and Finland insightful. We will develop these in the course of this paper, but we can already state here that Japanese language education in France is more widely and profoundly established in comparison to Finland and that this manifests in various ways in which Japanese language education is organized and conducted.

García and Menken (2010, 256-7) compare language education policy making to a kitchen staff team, with a chef, sous-chefs and other members of staff. While attending to different tasks in the same enterprise, they simultaneously collaborate and compete. Even if it is the educator in his or her classroom who wears the chef's hat, *la toque blanche*, and stirs the soup, other kitchen staff – government officials, official policy makers, communities, rectors, curriculum planners, textbook writers, test makers and assessors, researchers, parents and students – add their own distinct spices. The language policy soup is cooked according to changing menus in various types of pots and pans, consisting of the physical educational environment and context – that is, existing learning materials and facilities, appropriate terminology, test apparatuses, financial support, and so forth – not to mention the actual Japanese restaurant; access to education.

In secondary education in France, Japanese is at present in a paradoxical situation. While selected by a large number of learners, it is also officially recognized as one of the four 'big international languages' (together with Mandarin Chinese, Russian and Arabic) which are included in the Matriculation Examination (*baccalauréat*). Japanese language education is based on a complete and coherent system of guidelines and resources extending from junior to senior high school. It can be studied and selected in the Matriculation Examination as first, second or third foreign language (*langue vivante* LVA, LVB or LVC), as an optional language, as an 'international option' or in professional courses (BTS, Brevet de Technicien Supérieur). Two state exams for recruiting teachers exist: *agrégation* since 1985 and *CAPES*¹ since 2017.

In Finland Japanese has enjoyed a similar popularity as in France for a number of years and the 'Japanese boom' does not seem to be fading. Japanese has been taught in tertiary education for several

1 The *agrégation* is the most prestigious and demanding hiring contest for recruiting teachers in France. Successful candidates are qualified to teach in secondary and tertiary education. The *certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré* (CAPES) is a professional diploma, which can be obtained by fulfilling the disciplinary and professional requirements in a hiring contest (external, internal or reserved for public service employees). CAPES qualifies successful candidates to teach mainly in secondary education.

decades, longest at the University of Helsinki since 1938, but, compared to France, its history in secondary education is relatively short. Sporadic Japanese language courses have been offered in (basic and) upper secondary education for roughly two decades, mainly at the initiative of a handful of eager and interested instructors.

The inclusion of Japanese as an officially recognized optional foreign language in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools had to wait until as recently as 2015 (implemented since August 2016). Finland does not have a system of state exams or contests for recruiting schoolteachers, but subject teacher education is carried out at universities in collaboration by subject departments, teacher education departments and practice schools. Subject teacher education in Japanese (and Mandarin Chinese) in Finland has been organized solely at the University of Helsinki since 2014-15.

This kind of official recognition and the popularity of Japanese among high school students, however, is not reflected in the number of schools where the language can be studied in either country. Enthusiastic students face this paradox not only in secondary education, where finding Japanese courses is difficult or even impossible, but also in the beginning of their university careers. Masses of 'frustrated students of Japanese' fill – or, in the Finnish case, try to fill – university BA courses in Japanese and Japanese Studies, particularly in the first year.

To put it in a culinary metaphor, while in both countries the number of 'restaurants' that have Japanese in their menus cannot satisfy the needs of an increasing number of avid clientele, there is also a shortage of 'chefs' who have learnt to cook this type of Japanese cuisine – or who have learnt to cook at all.²

2 Japanese in Language Education (Policy) Soup

Japanese language education in secondary schools in France started off in a few educational institutions in large cities in the 1980s but began to develop only in the late 1990s. This did not happen at the initiative of authorities eager to promote a new language, but as a reaction to an increasing demand from pupils and their families and with the good will of certain education authorities and heads of school to respond (at least partially) to the demand.

The foundations for contemporary language policies in Finland were laid in the late 1970s (Huhta 2011), but Asian languages started to gain ground in policy discourses only from the 1980s and 1990s

² More thorough accounts of the situations in France and Finland are available in Galan (2017) and Länsisalmi (2019).

onwards. In the 21st century the role of Japanese language has been discussed in language education and internationalization policies as well as in various surveys on higher education and language education either in the context of Asia, particularly East Asia, or that of non-European languages.³

The demand for Japanese can largely be explained by the general infatuation of young people with Japan and the Japanese language – a situation which has existed in France and Finland much like in other parts Europe for the past two decades. For many it is now the Japanese 'soft power' (*manga*, *anime*, music, digital arts, fashion, etc.) which has superseded American popular culture. France has become the most important *manga* market in the world outside Japan, and the Japanese way of life, real or imagined, fascinates young people more and more. This Japanese boom shows no sign of fading away anytime soon in the 21st century.

Quite the contrary, the boom only seems to be gathering speed. In France this can be seen in the constant increase of learners of Japanese in public and private junior and senior high schools: 1995-96: 1,838 pupils; 2002-03: 2,177 pupils; 2005-06: 2,983 pupils; 2012-13: 3,491 pupils; 2016-17: 4,232 pupils and 2019-20: 4,886 pupils.⁴

In Finland official figures are not available, making a direct comparison with the French data not possible here. Japanese is lumped in the category of 'other languages', typically representing only less than 1% of languages learnt in secondary education. After a hiatus of nearly one decade, surveys on educational development in Finnish tertiary education have recently concluded, once again though, that:

It is likely that there will be more need for Chinese and Japanese language instruction [...] and therefore there will be more demand for instructors and specialists of these languages. (UNIFI 2015, 15; translation by Riikka Länsisalmi)⁵

³ *The Asia Action Programme* stressed language skills as "key factors when operating in Asia" and called for "continuity for studying Asian languages from the primary level via the secondary and up to the tertiary level". It concluded that "[t]he development needs for teaching languages [...] will be reviewed and necessary action will be taken on this basis" (Finnish Ministry of Education 2006, 20-1). Next, the Finnish Language Education Policies Project (KIEPO) was launched and its recommendations returned the ball to the Ministry: "The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with other experts, formulates a national strategy for lesser taught languages (Russian, German, French, Spanish) and non-European languages (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese)" (Luukka, Pöyhönen 2007, 459, translation by Riikka Länsisalmi).

⁴ All the figures listed in this paper refer only to metropolitan France and the overseas departments and regions (DOM and TOM) and exclude New Caledonia, which needs to be treated separately due to its geographical and administrative situation.

⁵ A recent investigation into the current state of the national language reserve, language levels and development needs was commissioned by the Ministry of Education

The great demand from pupils interested in learning the language thus constitutes the first core characteristic of Japanese language education in secondary school in France – quite different from other languages taught in school. As one senior high school principal put it: “It is quite rare that our students reveal their interest to actually learn something – and when that happens, we should not hesitate [to offer them the education they desire]”. In Finland there is a similar tendency, which nonetheless becomes more visible in the transition phase from upper secondary education to tertiary education.⁶

In France, this interest in the Japanese language and the increasing demand for learning opportunities coincided, nonetheless, with a period of financial trouble. In the end of the 1990s and in the beginning of the new millennium the French state – and therefore the Ministry of Education – faced serious budget restrictions, which limited new educational endeavours at schools to ‘existing resources’. In other words, the creation of something new required that something else had to be cut. Principals and other authorities thus faced a dilemma and had to make difficult choices: which courses should be discontinued in order to start new ones in Japanese? Or: who (teachers, partner countries, lobbyists, etc.) should be angered by reacting in a positive manner to those willing to study Japanese?

In Finland, consolidating the status of Japanese as a school subject has to a large extent been a micro-level policy-making effort, led by a limited number of active instructors, many of whom are mem-

and Culture in 2017. One of the multiple recommendations concerned a division of labour and collaboration in the teaching of Asian and African languages in higher education “in basic level education at language centres and similar places” (Pyykkö 2017, 126; translation by Riikka Länsisalmi). Collaborative online education was suggested as one of the means to be developed – even across national boundaries with other Nordic countries and Estonia.

6 The University of Helsinki, Faculty of Arts, is the only university in Finland which offers Japanese language education from the beginner’s level in the BA Programme in Languages (180 ECTS, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) until the advanced level in the MA Programme in Languages (120 ECTS). Since the establishment of these news programmes in autumn 2017, Japanese language has been one of the most competitive study options. Due to the extremely limited number of full-time personnel, the Japanese language track in the BA Programme in Languages has intake only once in two years. In its inaugural year in 2017, 189 students applied for a total of 12 slots, i.e. only 6% of the candidates were accepted after an entrance exam. In 2019 the number of applicants was 228 and they competed for 16 slots. Thus 7% were admitted. Until 2019-20 Japanese was a free minor option for students enrolled in other educational programmes, but, due to its extreme popularity, from 2020 onwards an internal minor entrance exam will be established. None of the students enrolled in the new BA Programme in Languages/Japanese Language track since 2017 have reached the MA level thus far, but external applicants and students who graduated from the pre-2017 BA Programme in Asian Studies have been accepted in the MA Programme in Languages/Asian Languages track. The number of Japanese language students continuing to the MA Programme directly from the BA Programme is likely to rise in the near future.

bers of the Finnish Teachers' Association of Japanese Language and Culture (JOY).⁷ The Ministry of Education and Culture, on the other hand, appears to have shifted its focus from Asia and Asian languages towards an overarching concept of a 'national language reserve'. A more practical policy advocator role, by contrast, has recently been fulfilled by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), which regularly allocates state subsidies for education development and internationalization and has supported a number of projects involving Japanese at school (e.g. *Ippo Project* 2012-18 and the ongoing *Asian and African Languages Project* 2018-20).⁸

Steering and organization of language education focus on enhancing access to education (*getting in*) (Kyckling et al. 2019). From this perspective, teachers have an important role in promoting accessibility, but also in Finland it is largely the school principals who are the actual gatekeepers. They hire teachers and decide how many pupils or students are required to form a group that is large enough to secure continuity. Although schools may list a respectable amount of possible foreign languages in their promotional material, the reality of *getting in* is often very different when only a handful of candidates sign up for language X and the course does not start. While the number of students willing to study any other foreign language than English is diminishing (KIEPO s.d.), also resistance from instructors of 'established' languages towards new – possibly popular – ones, such as Japanese, is understandable.

This constitutes the second core characteristic of Japanese in secondary education which applies both to the French and to the Finnish cases: when compared to other 'major' languages taught at school, the development of Japanese language education has been slow, hindered by socioeconomic considerations and choices based on budget limitations. As a result, Japanese can be studied only in very few

⁷ The Finnish Teachers' Association of Japanese Language and Culture (JOY, s.d.), established in 1993, has an important role as a national network of instructors in the field. It is currently the only Finnish member in the Japan Foundation's JF Nihongo Network (the 'Sakura Network'), and the number of members in the past years has risen to 50-55. Members of the JOY board run the action in their free time.

⁸ *Ippo* focused on Japanese Language education in Finnish secondary schools and was coordinated by an active instructor of Japanese and English at Rajamäki Upper Secondary School in Nurmijärvi, ca. 35 km from Helsinki. The project formed a network of twenty schools, developed and produced learning materials, organized events, coordinated a trainee placement programme in Japan, motivated and activated students, created a blog, and played a key role in the planning of the 2015 National Core Curriculum of Asian and African Languages (Ippo-hanke 2012, 2016a, 2016b). The aims of the Asian and African Languages Project include attracting interest towards Arabic, Chinese and Japanese and new teaching and learning models, creating national curricula for these languages in basic education, consolidating teachers' networks, and promoting the status of Chinese and Japanese as potential future languages to be included in the national Matriculation Examination (Aasian ja Afrikan kielten hanke 2019).

educational institutions, which are mainly located in the biggest cities: in France 75 junior and senior high schools in total, half of them public and the other half private; in Finland Japanese was listed as an optional language by 10 upper secondary schools and one school in basic education in an informal Teachers' Association survey in autumn 2019 (Japanin kielen ja kulttuurin opettajain yhdistys ry 2019).

The third major characteristic of Japanese in secondary education in France and in Finland is related to competition with Mandarin Chinese. In this competitive setting Japanese has been a direct 'victim' on the *institutional level* – a fact which is reflected in the quantitative development of Japanese language education in comparison with Chinese.⁹

Although student numbers at the beginning of the 1990s were rather similar in both languages in France (ca. 2,700 in Chinese and ca. 1,900 in Japanese in 1995), they later evolved in very different ways. The number of students choosing Chinese began to increase in the late 1990s, before exploding in the 2000s, and is today more than 45,000. This is ten times more than students choosing Japanese. This explosion was not due to a stronger student demand for Chinese rather than Japanese but to political and diplomatic decisions. China has in fact included the development of Chinese language education in its economic negotiations with France, a criterium which France has accepted. The development of Chinese as a language taught at school has, thus, been imposed on the Ministry of Education, which, without this request, would probably not have allocated so many resources (positions of teachers, inspectors, number of institutions, etc.) to Chinese language education.

Similarly, in Finland large cities (e.g. Helsinki, Tampere, Espoo) are eager to promote Chinese rather than Japanese. At present it is possible to select Chinese as a foreign language as early as in the first grade of basic education in some schools. A bilingual Finnish-Chinese curriculum has also been offered in Helsinki for a number of years.

These political and economic choices have had several dramatic consequences for Japanese language education; in the context of economic crisis and reduced budgets, considerable resources put into the development of Chinese (may) have been taken from other languages and have thus prevented their development – in the first instance that of popular Japanese. In the eyes of national and local representatives of the Ministries and other authorities, Japanese and Chinese are 'almost the same' and only one Asian language – in this case the more 'lucrative' one – is considered to be sufficient.

⁹ It must be added, though, that to some extent Japanese has also been able to 'jump on the same bandwagon' with Chinese in Finland, thanks to a handful of persistent and active Japanese language instructors.

To sum up, the situation of Japanese language education in secondary school in France and Finland is not too dire, and some positive development can be attested. This development could, nonetheless, match better with the high demand of aspiring students – a situation which should also be recognized by the authorities in charge. When analysed from the perspective of access to education on a national level, it is clear that students are not treated equally. More than 95% of France constitutes a 'black zone', where one has no chance to study Japanese in junior or senior high school. The situation is very similar in Finland. This is a clear paradox. Japanese is one of the favourite languages of young people, a language they want to study spontaneously. In reality, however, they only have a very small chance to be able to study it. In other words, wherever Japanese is offered, the number of pupils studying it is growing steadily, but the number of schools in which this language can be selected remains very limited. Large areas of France and Finland are a desert for Japanese.

Our kitchen metaphor illustrates the paradoxical situation: while the number of students interested in enjoying Japanese cuisine is increasing, the number of restaurants offering their favourite menu remains low and geographically dispersed – leaving potential customers dissatisfied.

3 Who Is the Chef? Japanese Language Teachers in Schools

In France, Japanese language education is at present (2019) in the hands of roughly 90 teachers (public and private junior and senior high schools). This group of instructors is very heterogeneous both in terms of status as well as competencies. 13 are qualified teachers who have passed the prestigious *agrégation* exam (*professeurs agrégés*), 7 are qualified teachers who hold the CAPES (external) qualification (*professeurs certifiés*), 6 hold the CAPES reserved/internal promotion of contract employees (*professeurs certifiés*) and the remaining ca. 60 instructors have varying positions (replacements, contract-based instructors, assistant teachers, etc.). To put it differently, this means that only 20 instructors or ca. 22% have been hired based on a national examination, which assesses their Japanese language proficiency and has enabled prior pedagogical education.

An important step in the development of Japanese language education in France was the creation of CAPES in 2016, linked particularly to qualitative improvement. This is reflected in the increasingly prestigious position of Japanese in secondary education and the willingness of the Ministry of Education to acknowledge the situation and to improve the quality of existing education. Thus far the examination has been organized four times in 2017-20, every time with three vacancies (and four in 2020). At the moment the situation

is satisfactory, as, like in the case of the *agrégation*, it is important to organize the examination regularly. It is also important to announce a reasonable number of teaching positions each time in order to attract the best MA or PhD graduates in Japanese, for whom such positions offer a new professional career option.

The instructors without formal qualification can be divided into two major categories: those with Japanese roots (ca. 70%) and locals. The former are employed solely because of their background and usually do not have formal pedagogical education or understanding of the structure and demands of the French education system. The latter have a BA or (more rarely) an MA degree in Japanese, but no pedagogical education. In addition, some of them have a rather weak Japanese language proficiency.

A systematic mapping of the role of educators and other agents in the enterprise in Finland is yet to be undertaken, but it is clear that bottom-up 'unplanned planning' sparked up or supported by active local personae has played an important role in the context of secondary education. The determination of the source for language instructors and how they would be educated has been a topic of negotiations between universities, largely the University of Helsinki, and the Ministry of Education and Culture.¹⁰

From the perspective of enabling learning (*getting it*), both pre-service and in-service teacher education are highly significant. Teachers play the role of 'chefs' in the classroom and "can promote pupils' prerequisites for learning with suitable high-quality pedagogy" (Kyckling et al. 2019). In Finland primary school teachers teach grades 1-6 in basic education (ages 7-13), while subject teachers usually teach grades 7-9 and at upper secondary school (ages 13-19). Subject teachers typically teach one major and another minor subject (Lavonen s.d.), in the case of foreign languages for example French and Spanish. For a subject teacher qualification, a minimum of 120 ECTS of study in total is required in the major subject to be taught and 60 ECTS in the minor one. A teacher of English and Japanese may therefore have studied English as a major in a BA and MA programme and Japanese as a minor. Subject teachers must have a BA degree (180 ECTS) and an MA degree (120 ECTS), which usually includes 60 ECTS of pedagogical studies – another requirement for a qualified instructor.

Subject teacher education in Japanese and Chinese in Finland has been organized solely at the University of Helsinki since 2014-15, initially in the MA Programme of East Asian Studies, and since 2017-

¹⁰ How access to Japanese language is achieved – or not – on a local level at schools is a topic that would require more understanding of how power operates at the micro-level of situated discourses and practices.

18 in the newly established MA Programme in Languages.¹¹ Those who wish to become Japanese language subject teachers at school (basic and upper secondary education) select the specific Japanese Subject Teacher Education track, which includes 60 ECTS of general pedagogical studies, offered by the Faculty of Educational Sciences. In pedagogical studies only three slots are currently available for aspiring students of Japanese, but only one or two have been filled annually thus far.¹²

The organization of teaching practice in Japanese is a typical 'chicken or egg' situation; who can offer a practice placement and function as a supervisor in a situation where only a handful of trained Japanese language instructors exist and only very few have full-time teaching jobs in schools? In Finland, those lucky ones who have managed to land teaching jobs in Japanese usually teach also another language as their major subject, typically English, or function simultaneously as part-time instructors in various schools and other educational institutions.¹³

Such diverse 'chefs' play a non-negligible role in how daily Japanese language education is organized at schools. Some are, indeed,

11 This programme is a combination of 10 learning tracks and offers education in a total of 22 languages. The Asian Languages track (120 ECTS) includes Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Hindi and Urdu. Students major in one of these languages (or Hindi and Urdu). Thus far no other university in Finland has held the training responsibility of Asian languages allocated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, but in 2019 Chinese was added to the responsibilities of the University of Turku. A Chinese language education programme will start in Turku at the School of Languages and Translation Studies in 2020 (Turun yliopisto 2019).

12 Students must be enrolled or planning to enrol in the MA Programme in Languages and they have to pass an internal application process, which includes an interview at the Faculty of Educational Sciences. In the case of students of Japanese and Chinese, usually one of the two interviewers is a representative of the Asian Languages Track.

13 In addition to the regular subject teacher education as part of an MA degree, at the University of Helsinki separate extra studies are offered to those who have prior tertiary level education (in Japanese). Native speakers, who have some experience and educational background in Japanese (as a foreign language) and who can follow instruction in Finnish, can also apply for extra studies to complement their subject expertise, i.e. the requirements of 60 ECTS in Japanese taught as a minor subject at school. The Faculty of Arts reviews the application and the person in charge of the Japanese language curriculum at the Department of Languages gives a recommendation on whether to accept the application and, if so, which courses the applicant should take. The faculty can issue an equivalency certificate as a proof of (extra) studies that correspond to subject studies required of a subject teacher. The certificate must be requested in writing and at present costs 126 EUR. It must be stressed, though, that the certificate alone does not qualify anyone as a subject teacher. A qualified teacher must have completed the required 60 ECTS of pedagogical studies on top of proven expertise in her or his own teaching subject(s). By the end of 2018 eight students had been issued an equivalency certificate in Japanese and in 2019-20 two are still in the process of completing their studies. The option of extra studies seems to be rather attractive and new applications are submitted by candidates with varying backgrounds on an annual basis.

permanent qualified teachers, but others are replacements and contract-based part-time instructors. The former have a certified level of Japanese language proficiency and at least some understanding of didactics and of what it means to be a teacher. They have job security, a relatively good salary and an institutional status. The latter have not passed any (national) examinations and have been hired only because there was no other candidate available. They are in a precarious situation, their salary is low and their institutional status is (nearly) non-existing, perhaps limited only to the informal recognition from the part of their students and their students' parents. As far as the target language is concerned, those with Japanese roots naturally have an excellent command. This is not necessarily the case with local temporary instructors. A shared characteristic of these two types of instructors, however, may be their lack of pedagogical education and the fact that they have often landed teaching jobs accidentally or by default.

In sum, along the lines of our culinary metaphor, there are thus various types of 'chefs' in the kitchen. A minority has learned to cook and their competencies have been tested and assessed in national examinations or formal pedagogical training. The large majority, however, has never been assessed and they have ended up as 'chefs' solely because they come from families who already own a 'Japanese restaurant'.

4 Menus and Recipes for Japanese Language Education (Policy) Soup

What do these chefs cook? Even if the menus are imposed or proposed by the French Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Agency for Education, the recipe for each plate is grounded in the instructors' know-how and personal tastes.

In France until the 2000s every foreign language was taught according to specific curricula adapted to different options (first, second or third foreign language) and grades. At present they have been replaced by a single common curriculum for all the languages, which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and adjusted to the various courses and grades. Consequently, the Ministry of Education has decided to opt for action-oriented language pedagogy (acquisition of competencies by conducting various tasks), with a focus on communicative skills (CEFR). In addition, a choice was made to teach foreign languages via culture. These curricula, imposed on the instructors, are complemented with language-specific resources (examples of progression, sample classes, etc.), which the teachers are free to use for inspiration but are not obliged to resort to.

While the Ministry of Education and Culture (formerly the Ministry of Education) is the highest authority of public education and responsible for higher education, it is the National Agency for Education (EDUFI, formerly the Finnish National Board of Education) that holds responsibility for pre-primary, basic and general upper secondary education in Finland. The core curricula issued by EDUFI constitute the basic foundation for drawing up more specific local curricula and outline the objectives and core contents for each school subject.

In the present 2015 National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools, Japanese is included under the title of 'Asian and African Languages'. As responding to the needs of such diverse languages as Japanese, Chinese and Arabic is not an easy task, common objectives and core contents are described rather loosely. Rather than stressing specific target levels, the focus is on communicative, socio-cultural and socio-pragmatic skills. Students are encouraged to locate inspiring learning materials and methods, and the described courses are built around specific themes. Based on the national curriculum, local school districts create their own more detailed syllabi. Even in the local version, specific to Japanese, there are no guidelines as to what vocabulary, grammatical structures or *kanji* should be taught in each course.

In the case of Japanese, it is not an easy task to conform these institutional frameworks, including their programmatic and pedagogical options, with the profile of the instructors as described above. Given the fact that not only has the vast majority (in the French case up to 80%) of the instructors never learnt to 'cook' this type of cuisine, many of them have never even tasted it themselves.¹⁴

The major difficulty these instructors face is not necessarily Japanese language education *per se*, but rather the capacity and attitude they possess – or not – to function in the French or Finnish educational system, in the framework of official French or Finnish learning materials and in front of pupils whose mother tongue is usually French, Finnish or Swedish and who, in any case, are not Japanese and do not behave in a Japanese manner. It is thus not solely Japanese language pedagogy that is a point of concern here, but instructors' challenges are more related to the transmission of knowledge, behaviour in class and the knowledge and acceptance of official texts and the related target groups – all aspects linked to pedagogical competences.

The teacher's profession is something that one has to learn and embrace in a given institutional context. Instructors must be able to reflect on their teaching practices as teachers, not only as teachers of Japa-

¹⁴ The Japanese native speakers may have been recruited purely because the school had no tenured teachers available and because these individuals happened to be in France for their own personal reasons but were not originally involved in language teaching.

nese. Access to language, for example, is organized in the French educational setting in a specific manner, that is, *via culture*. This is what the official curricula demand and this cannot be negotiated. There are no other optional routes; one enters the language via culture and not vice versa. This principle, however, is often neglected by many instructors simply because they rely on a non-French pedagogical framework (not to say Japanese), which is almost exclusively focused on the Japanese language alone – syntax, vocabulary, *kana* and *kanji*.

For these instructors, the principal challenge is to manage to reflect on their own pedagogical practices even before they enter the profession. If one is put in a situation where one has to teach, while one has never learnt to teach and has never really thought about the art of teaching, one either – and most likely – imitates one's former teachers or tries to teach on the basis of imagined representations about the teacher's profession one has nurtured earlier. However, such – Japanese – methods, much like the representations, cannot work in the French or Finnish context.

Entering through culture obviously does not mean inserting vocabulary such as *sushi* or *kimono* in the expressions to be studied, but that language learning and acquisition of proficiency are motivated by a direct link to the capacity to communicate and function in the target culture where the language is used. Teaching a language – in this case Japanese – does not happen in a language-only vacuum, but in a very specific institutional, material and cultural context and, to point it out once more, in a context where the students' mother tongue (and not Japanese) forms the basis of their linguistic understanding.

Teaching Japanese in Finland and teaching Japanese in France therefore require very different pedagogical solutions and strategies due to the learners' native languages. Speakers of Finnish or Swedish, which is the second official language of Finland, are equipped with linguistic know-how and awareness which is not identical to that of their French-speaking peers. In other words, in order to prepare the same dish, the French 'chefs' need to use quite different recipes and ingredients compared to their Finnish colleagues. In addition, they need to be aware of this, they must have learnt the trade and they should have the adequate utensils and ingredients at hand.

5 Pots and Pans. Where to Cook the Japanese Language (Policy) Soup?

As Kyckling et al. (2019) point out:

Language hierarchies are presently visible in the access to education (*getting in*), the enabling of learning (*getting it*) and the value of learning (*getting out*).

These counterproductive language hierarchies are intertwined with the various stakeholders and their ideologies, attitudes and beliefs, as well as the 'pots and pans' of language education policy-making.

In Finland, Japanese has only a very short history in the national core curriculum and is lumped in the category of 'Asian and African languages'. On the other hand, viewed through pink glasses, the latter title can also be seen as a welcome sign from the part of the authorities to provide more entrances to additional languages – a more ecological approach to language education policies at best.

Internationally, the Japanese Government, through the Japan Foundation, develops the JF Nihongo Network (the so-called 'Sakura Network'), which is defined as "a global network linking the core Japanese-language institutions and teacher associations in order to promote the spread of Japanese language efficiently" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2019). While France boasts eight network members, including four universities, the only Finnish member is the voluntary-based Finnish Teachers' Association of Japanese Language and Culture (Japan Foundation 2019a).¹⁵ In terms of direct support for Japanese language education activities and development, European cities and countries without a Japan Foundation (JF) office are in a less favourable position than those with continuous JF presence. Online workshops for instructors have been developed in recent years, but due to varying educational frameworks, teaching philosophies, local needs, etc., creating 'one size fits all' sessions is not a realistic task.

In both countries the 'chefs' or 'apprentice chefs' who teach Japanese in secondary education thus face serious 'administrative' challenges. Their kitchens are poorly equipped and lack many basic ingredients and utensils, more specifically something that many, particularly Japanese instructors, consider essential – adequate textbooks.

Learning materials constitute a core element in pedagogy. This is even more the case in Japanese language education, where instructors with Japanese roots are accustomed to organizing their pedagogical activities around the textbook – which in France and Finland typically has a very different function.

In Japan the textbook is in fact the principal pedagogical instrument. It is compulsory to use one, the textbook is totally adapted to the curricula with which it forms a coherent whole, and it must be finished by the end of the relevant school year. In short, although it totally deprives the instructor of any pedagogical freedom, it also of-

15 It is unclear what criteria are used to select members. The sole educator of Japanese language instructors in Finland, the University of Helsinki, for example, was denied membership. Membership in the network is listed as an asset in the application guidelines for Japan Foundation's Japanese-Language Education grants, but "[u]nfortunately, there is no plan to add new members to the Network for the time being" (Japan Foundation 2019b).

fers relief. The teacher does not have to worry about what to teach and when; just follow the textbook...

In France and Finland, the textbook is a pedagogical tool among others. It is not compulsory to use a textbook and teachers alone decide whether or not to use one or which one to use. In most cases they use the textbook only as a teaching aid and almost never from the beginning until the very end. In principle the textbook is adapted to the curricula, but it may as well be based on a particular pedagogical idea or teaching philosophy. In short, the textbook never offers a 'complete' pedagogical solution. It does not provide answers to the didactic questions asked by the instructor; at best it can help the instructor to make practical choices in daily life at school.

When French and Finnish or Japanese instructors of Japanese request a textbook they are thus not talking about the same thing. Quite often the textbook is in fact related to the instructor's professional experience conversely. Those with less teaching experience are eager to use a textbook and unhappy without it. The more the teachers have experience, the less likely they are to be upset without a textbook or desperate to acquire one. Experienced instructors know that a textbook will never correspond to their needs and practice and that they would only use it partly, if at all. As they will never be able to find a textbook that would suit all their students, they often prefer to create their pedagogical materials themselves.

From an institutional perspective and when thinking about the development of Japanese language education as a goal, it could be suggested that publication of genuine Japanese language textbooks for French and Finnish schools is necessary for three reasons. First of all, they place Japanese language education in the institutional setting among the other disciplines (the textbook is a pledge, an important carrier of institutional legitimacy). Second, they suggest and develop terminology and language pedagogical theory relevant to the students' native languages and provide natural localized contexts for language practice and use. Third, they can help and reassure unexperienced instructors by offering them an initial working framework – a framework from which they can quite naturally detach themselves as they gain more teaching experience. From a purely pedagogical perspective, by contrast, the existence of such textbooks is much less urgent, if not unnecessary.

What is in fact a 'genuine school textbook'? It is a manual that is: manufactured in large quantities by a private publishing house; whose contents are in accordance with the teaching guidelines and national programmes and curricula; which is renewed with each new programme reform; which is written for a specific school year; and which is not expensive.

In this sense the pedagogical Japanese language education materials that exist in France are not school textbooks. They are not

manufactured in large quantities; their contents may be (or not) in accordance with the teaching guidelines and national programmes at the time of their writing, but they are not renewed with each new programme reform; they are not written for a specific school year or even a specific public; and they are expensive. The cheapest ones, and therefore the most likely to be recommended by schools, available on the market, are mainly created by Japanese or foreign publishers and pose many problems of use for teachers.

In Finland, it is only as recently as in 2019 and 2020 that a handful of experienced teachers have published Japanese language textbooks or similar materials independently (on demand) or online with the support of EDUFI, specifically for secondary education.

Marugoto is an example of textbooks and resources developed by the Japan Foundation. However, as explained above, using such textbooks in local educational contexts is problematic – and this is the case in France, where *Marugoto* is rarely used in classrooms, if at all. And when it is, teachers are not really satisfied with it and only use it 'for want of a better one'. Why? Simply because *Marugoto* is a self-contained method and completely disconnected from the social and human reality of classroom teaching due to its universal and transnational vocation.

As a textbook designed to be used in any country, *Marugoto* is necessarily based entirely on the language it teaches (Japanese) and progresses from simple to complex material. However, a method that moves from simple to complex rarely works with pupils because 'simple' and 'complex' refer to the subject matter which is studied and not to learners' abilities.

Moreover, by choosing to focus on the 'average' learner of an 'average' age, *Marugoto* may appear too difficult or too easy depending on the audience. It reassures certain young instructors who can cling to it as a pedagogical tool, but it does not make their lives easier because they have to complement, reformat and adapt it to the curriculum. This is in fact the case with all the books used as textbooks in France (*Minna no nihongo*, *Hirake nihongo*, *Genki*, etc. produced in Japan, and *Manekineko*, *Neko no te*, *Sanpo*, etc. produced in France).

In reality the 'best' or in any case the most efficient instructors do not use textbooks in class or resort to them only sporadically as supporting material. They create their pedagogical materials independently, based on various existing resources. In this sense, it is the learners' 'notebook' – a personalized compilation of recipes – which, little by little, class after class, builds up, plays the role of the textbook and is much more effective.

6 The Future of Japanese Language Education (Soup)

The French situation described above is reality at present but perhaps not in the future. The Ministry of Education has in fact undertaken an important and radical reform, in effect as of 2021, of the most important French school diploma, the *baccalauréat*. This reform affects not only the educational programmes and resources, but also the place of foreign languages in the curricula. Even if the infatuation of French youth with the Japanese language does not seem to be fading anytime soon, the position of Japanese as a third foreign language in secondary education, the most popular option chosen by students, is uncertain. In the new examination a third foreign language will in fact no longer accumulate any points to be included in the final grade. Will students and their families thus continue to spend time (and a lot of time) studying a discipline which does not bring them any immediate profit? In addition, the financing of third foreign languages will in the future depend uniquely on the budgets of educational institutions. Will school principals, in charge of increasingly and dramatically diminishing budgets, therefore continue to maintain courses which 'will be of no benefit' for the students? It is perhaps too early to say, but there are several signs which point to the direction that Japanese language education – along with other so called 'rare' languages – may be facing a difficult period.

This is in fact another characteristic of Japanese language education – and other school disciplines – in France: multiple and repetitive reforms of the education system at the discretion of political changes in the government. The past two decades have witnessed multiple reforms and they continue to affect the institutional and pedagogical framework where education is embedded. They do not offer the possibility for instructors to improve the quality of their work, but rather repeat a cycle of reforms that always reform the previous ones, modifying the rules, expectations, targets, etc. in their course.

In Finland, too, soon after the 2015 curriculum came into effect, the new government decided on a complete reform of general upper secondary education, and the legislation on upper secondary schools was rewritten in 2019. A new Act and Decree entered into force in January 2020, and consequently the National Core Curriculum was rewritten in the same year. The new, totally revised curriculum now applies to students who will start their education in August 2021.¹⁶

¹⁶ The 2019 curriculum now includes syllabi for Asian and African Languages as 'B3' and 'A' languages, which start in upper secondary school and basic education respectively. Ability to interact and understand and produce texts/discourse are described loosely as CEFR target levels A2.2–B1.1. in an 'A language' and A1.3–A2.1 in a 'B3 language' (Opetushallitus 2019, 177). Students can continue to study an 'A language' throughout their schooling until the end of upper secondary education. Levels A.2.2–

Simultaneously, university entrance exams will be reformed in order to allow easier admission based on Matriculation Examination grades attained in secondary education.¹⁷ The relative weight of subjects such as mathematics in this reform is likely to have a negative impact on the attractiveness of foreign languages.

EDUFI and the Ministry of Education and Culture (2018) have continued to finance projects, which aim at diversifying the repertoire of foreign languages taught at schools and included in the Finnish Matriculation Examination, but such efforts suffered an apparent unexpected setback in the most recent legislative reforms on education. The 2019 Government Decree on the Matriculation Examination now enumerates the foreign languages in which the exam can be taken: English, Spanish, French, German, Russian, Latin and Portuguese and the three autochthonous Sámi languages that are spoken in Finland, Northern Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi (Finlex 2019) – this contrary to the Ministry's most recent recommendations to add Japanese, Chinese and Estonian to the exam (Rinta-Aho, Mikola 2018, 37).¹⁸

Finally, to return to our culinary metaphor, it is as if 'chefs' would be forced to prepare their dishes in a kitchen which is continuously refurbished and reorganized and where the places of ingredients and materials would be changed non-stop. They should always learn new recipes without any time to be able to get to know them and modify them again as soon as they would have finally mastered them. Tiring, frustrating and discouraging. This is the state French and Finnish 'chefs' are in. And not only those working in Japanese 'restaurants'.

B1.1 refer to post-basic education. If offered, at the end of basic education by grade nine pupils should reach level A2.1 in an Asian or African language (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese). School districts are given free hands to apply the guidelines of other 'A languages' to locally drafted syllabi, but for a 'B3 language' a total of 8 modules are specified on two levels: basic elementary (3 modules) and basic (5 modules). Each module now consists of two credits, while one credit corresponds to 19 x 45 min lessons (Opetushallitus 2019, 9, 197-201). Besides common themes such as school, hobbies, free time, daily habits and traditions, core contents include also basic elements of linguistic knowledge, such as introduction to variation in the target language.

17 At the completion of general upper secondary school studies, students take the national Matriculation Examination.

18 When questioned by a journalist about the rationale for maintaining Latin, Portuguese and Italian while disregarding Japanese and Chinese, the Matriculation Examination Board Secretary General simply replied: "Portuguese, Italian and Latin have a long history in the Matriculation Examination" (Grönholm 2019). Despite the long history, the number of examinees in foreign languages has been decreasing remarkably in recent years. Portuguese, for example, has had on average only 11 candidates per exam in the past five years (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta 2019, 3).

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